

## General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

### Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Urgyen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of [Order members](#) and [Mitrans](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Tiratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

The seminars were all recorded and later transcribed. Some of these transcriptions have been carefully checked and edited and are [now available in book form](#). However, a great deal of material has so far remained unchecked and unedited and we want to make it available to people who wish to deepen their understanding of Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

How should one approach reading a seminar transcription from so long ago? Maybe the first thing to do is to vividly imagine the context. What year is it? Who is present? We then step into a world in which Sangharakshita is directly communicating the Dharma. Sometimes he is explaining a text, at other times he is responding to questions and we can see how the emergence of Dharma teachings in this context was a collaborative process, the teaching being drawn out by the questions people asked. Sometimes those questions were less to do with the text and arose more from the contemporary situation of the emerging new Buddhist movement.

Reading through the transcripts can be a bit like working as a miner, sifting through silt and rubble to find the real jewels. Sometimes the discussion is just a bit dull. Sometimes we see Sangharakshita trying to engage with the confusion of ideas many of us brought to Buddhism, confusion which can be reflected in the texts themselves. With brilliant flashes of clarity and understanding, we see him giving teachings in response that have since become an integral part of the Tiratna Dharma landscape.

Not all Sangharakshita's ways of seeing things are palatable to modern tastes and outlook. At times some of the views captured in these transcripts express attitudes and ideas [Tiratna has acknowledged as unhelpful](#) and which form no part of our teaching today. In encountering all of the ideas contained in over seventeen million words of Dharma investigation and exchange, we are each challenged to test what is said in the fire of our own practice and experience; and to talk over 'knotty points' with friends and teachers to better clarify our own understanding and, where we wish to, to decide to disagree.

We hope that over the next years more seminars will be checked and edited for a wider readership. In the meantime we hope that what you find here will inspire, stimulate, encourage - and challenge you in your practice of the Dharma and in understanding more deeply the approach of Urgyen Sangharakshita.

*Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team*

## DISCLAIMER

This transcript has not been checked by Sangharakshita, and may contain mistakes and mishearings. Checked and reprinted copies of all seminars will be available as part of the [Complete Works Project](#).

the goddesses. One has got the(Nibelogan Leida ?) One has got, in the case of the Celts, all those quite wonderful myths which eventually found efflorescence in the Grail cycle and so on. What's the general term for all those?

V: Arthurian

S: Arthurian, yes, you could say they are Arthurian but not completely Arthurian. And then of course in the case of Christianity one has Christianity's own ~pecific myths. The myths about the virgin birth and about the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension and the annunciation. These are all actually myths, as perhaps we are only now just beginning really to appreciate. So clearly myth has got a connection with culture. Myths are found in every culture, they form part of every culture. But what the exact nature of the relation is I wouldn't really care to say. It's almost as though sometimes myth is at the beginning of culture, It's almost as though, and here I am just hazarding a guess, culture grows out of -myth or is perhaps an aspect of myth. But perhaps I can at least say that there is no culture without myth and perhaps it is significant that a modern humanistic and secular culture tends to move a way from the myth. Or perhaps it has got its own myths. There are one or two scientific myths around, I believe. I have been reading a book, recently, about the scientists who were responsible, ultimately, for the production of the atom bomb. And one little myth that I encountered there, it was explained in this book that it was in fact a myth, was that Hoppenheimer was the father of the atom bomb. But actually he wasn't, this one might say was a modern sort of scientific myth. Actually the whole story it would seem was much ~ore complicated, and also more interesting than that. But in popular scientific mythology, Hoppenheimer appears as the father of the atom bomb, father representing, quite obviously, a quite mythical concept in itself.

So one might say in conclusion, that yes, the connection between culture on the one hand and myth on the other or myth on the one hand and culture on the other, is quite intimate. But about the exact nature of that connection, o~ that relation- ship, I wouldn't care at the moment to pronounce. Perhaps it isn't so easy to say what it is. In any case perhaps it requires further thought.

Vessantara: prassanasiddhi also had a question about culture.

Prassanasiddhi: It arose out of my study group. Actually it is a five-fold question divided into two sections.

The first bit arose out of your saying that through arts and sciences the mind becomes more attuned to spiritual things. So I wondered, would the level of cultural develop- ment of a given society affect the level of receptivity to the Dharma of its inhabitants? Then; in societies with ~a low level of cultural development would, say an- O-r-der Member,~ (for example~) have to involve himself or herself on a cultural as app~osed to a spiritual plane? Then; is it p~ossible that some societie~s~, m~aybe centuries away, s-pe-ak-ing in a collective sense, fr~o~m true appreciation of the--Dharma, due to their level of cultu~tal developm~ent and related to that to what extent does the cultural

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development of -a -so-ciety support the emergence of individuals?~ - Then there are a couple of different questions.

S: Right, let's have these first then. Just reread that first clause.

Prassanasiddhi: Would the level of cultural development of a given society affect the level of receptivity to the Dharma of its inhabitants?

S: Well there does seem to be a connection between culture and spiritual life. Because, if one looks back and tries to see in what sort of cultural milieu higher religious or higher spiritual teachings have emerged, one doesn't, so far as I recollect, ever see them emerging from a cultural vacuum. If one

takes, for instance, the case of India. The India of the Buddha's day was far from uncultured. The China of Confucius' day was far from uncultured. The Roman Pal-stinian world of the time of Christ was far from uncultured, that Mediterranean world which saw the birth of Christianity was far from uncultured. The only possible exception, to some extent, though we don't actually know all that much about it was the Arabia of the time of Mohammed. It wasn't perhaps cultured in the sense that these other areas were but nonetheless one mustn't underestimate the possibilities of oral culture. There was not much in the way of literature, well come to that in the days of the Buddha there was no written literature, there was a very rich oral tradition which was afterwards written down. We do know that the Arabia of Mohammed's day was infiltrated by both Jewish and Christian culture and that he was in contact with that. So perhaps Islam is not by any means a real exception to what would seem to be that general rule. So yes, this does seem to be the position; that higher spiritual teachings emerge within a context of a higher culture, broadly speaking. One also sees, looking at the history of religions, that they react upon cultures and very often refine those cultures in their turn. There's a sort of reciprocal relationship. One sees that as, for instance, Buddhism goes to China. There the Buddhism found a very highly developed, very rich culture, but Buddhism had a very fructifying influence Chinese culture and helped it to rise to new heights. One can probably say that Chinese Buddhist culture was the absolute flower of Chinese culture generally. The Tang and Sung dynasties are generally considered to represent the peak of Chinese cultural achievement in practically all fields. And they were dynasties during which the influence of Buddhism was especially strong. So one does see this sort of reciprocal relationship between culture and religion, it would seem higher spiritual teachings arising within the context of a matrix of culture and in their turn - eventually refining that culture. What was the next part of the question, the next clause?

Prassanasiddhi: In societies with a low level of cultural development would, say, an Order Member, for example, have to involve himself or herself on the cultural as apposed to the spiritual plane. Or more on the cultural as apposed to the spiri- tual plane?

S: It's a question, or it would be a question of communication. Receptivity to the Dharma would seem to imply, or would seem

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to involve a fairl high degree of emotional receptivity~and therefore, even, o emotional refinement. And that is usually achieVed initially through or by means of culture. So if you find yourself in an area, in a region or a part of the world where people were very uncultured the chances are that they would be emotionally unrefined and therefore not very receptive to a spiritual teaching like Buddhism. So therefore as part of your teaching of the Dharma you might need to involve yourself in cultural activities. We know that even in the West, even in a place like London not many people, not the majority of people by any means, are open to or receptive to directly spiritual teachings. We know that in some cases they can be, sort of coaxed into taking an interest in the Dharma, as such, with the help of cultural activities conducted under the auspices, so to speak, of Buddhism, which cultural activities provide them with a sort of bridge-- between their interest in culture itself and a possible interest in Buddhism. So I would say that yes, if the people among whom you were trying to communicate the Dharma were, as it were uncultured and therefore emotionally unrefined you might initially have to speak the language of culture rather than the language of the Dharma. You would have to speak the language of culture, so to sPeak, in order eventually to be able to speak the language of the Dharma at all. In a sense you r speaking of the language of culture would be speaking the language of the Dharma because to speak the language of the Dharma, to communicate the message of the Buddha would be your ultimate objective. I have referred before to the fact that I have found in the past that be teaching, say, a group of students an English poem without any thought of Buddhism, without any intention even, any conscious intention of communicating Buddhism or communicating the Dharma, if you go deeply enough into the meaning of that poem you will in fact find yourself naturally communicating, spontaneously communicating something of what we call the Dharma.

Prassanasiddhi: Some thing?

S: Well, no doubt one's audience has limitations. What's the next clause.

Prassanasiddhi: Is it possible that some societies may be centuries away, speaking in a collective sense, from a true appreciation of the Dharma due to their level of cultural development?

S: This reminds of something that Mahatma Gandhi is supposed to have said. I quoted it recently, I hope too many of you haven't heard it. He was asked once what he thought of Christianity in England, and he said that he thought it would be a good idea. (laughter) So one might say in the same way, what do you think about culture in England and one might reply, 'one thinks that it would be a good idea'. Because actually, nowadays, though culture is available in the sense that facilities are available, books are available, there are art galleries, there are museums, there are all these sort of wonderful opportunities the actual level of culture in the sense of cultural appreciation and cultural sensitivity, let us say, is probably not very high, So I think what this means is that one has to be a little bit careful about jumping to conclusions in specific cases as to whether this area is a cultured area or not a cultured area and so on. One shouldn't assume, say, that the Eskimos are uncultured people and that the inhabitants of New York are a

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cultured people. One shouldn't necessarily make that assumption. Or that the members of a certain allegedly primitive tribe in New Guinea are uncultured whereas the people of Paris are cultured. I think one should be very careful about making assumptions of that sort.

Padmavajra: Do you think that people in India, would you say that they are actually -more cultured than we are, even though they don't have our...

S: Well, 'people in India', you know there are an awful lot of people in India (laughter) speaking fourteen major languages and following four or five major religions. It's not easy to generalise about them. but there are certain respects in which a lot of Indians, I will at least say this, are more cultured. Or, certain respects in which their culture shows more than it does in the case of many communities in the West, and that is their social life. Their manners and customs, their way of behaving to one another, their politeness, their way of bringing up their children, the way of looking after their old people. Their general sensitivity in human relationships and human contact and human communication. I think many Indians are probably more cultured in this sort of way than are a lot of people in the West.

Abahya: Wouldn't that then bring us to have to distinguish between civilisation and culture, or do you equate the two?

S: Well in the past I have made do with a rough and ready definition of the difference. I would say that culture pertains more to the individual whereas civilisation pertains more to the group. Civilisation is from civis, which is from the city and culture is essentially individual, even though of course you may have a number of cultured individuals who together would form a cultured community, a cultured society. There is a certain amount of overlap between the two terms just as there is, perhaps, between the individual and the group. But that is how I have, in the past differentiated the two.

Prassanasiddhi: I think asking these questions I was just wondering whether perhaps there were certain countries in the world where to go to try and spread the Dharma may be quite an unprofitable task. Because you would go there and people just wouldn't really be able to understand what you are actually trying to communicate.

S: I think one would need to be more specific. For instance one might say that a culture which was extremely or intensely militaristic would not be likely to give you a very favourable hearing if you were

to speak about the Dharma. I'm thinking for instance of, let's say, nineteenth century Prussia where culture was to a very great extent militaristic. They, perhaps, would not have looked with favour on a teaching like that of Buddhism. Or let's say a culture, if one can use that term, of which human sacrifice or cannibalism was a part, perhaps they wouldn't lend a very favourable ear to the pacific precepts of Buddhism. Or a culture in which wealth was considered of very great importance. Where, in fact, Mammon was very vigorously worshipped.

Pras-s-anasiddhi: I was just wondering that maybe there was

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some countries in the West where., like people have said it's a hard slog in England trying to spread the Dharma, but I was wondering maybe there are some other countries in the Western world....?

S: Well we can only try. I rather suspect that it is probably as easy in England to spread the Dharma as it is going to be anywhere. And I think, actually, we have, in starting up our activities in England we have probably been following the line of least resistance with the possible exception of India. But in India there is a very special situation owing to the mass conversion of the ex-untouchables to Buddhism~ which means that the ground has been broken up and ploughed in a very rough and ready fashion, but the heavy work has been done, in a sense, for us in that way. Anyway, let's go on, there were two other...?

Prassanasiddhi: I've still got three. I don't know about this one. To what extent does the cultural development of the society support the emergence of the true individual?

S: I think I have already really dealt with that by pointing out that one doesn't actually find spiritual traditions emerging except within a context of some cultural refinement. Because there has to be a language to begin with, the spiritual genius can't devise his own language. Even if he did people couldn't understand it. There has got to be a language sufficiently developed for him to be able to express his very refined and highly developed spiritual ideas through the medium of that language. Even if he does have to modify it to some extent. Then...?

Prassanasiddhi: presumably there is a danger of losing touch - with the Dharma due to over-preoccupation with culture. So how could one spot this in oneself and others and how~ could one guard against this?

S: First of all this would assume that you have the capacity to interest yourself directly in the Dharma. Presuming you did have that capacity I think it would be pretty obvious whether you were spending, so to speak, too much time on culture and too little on the Dharma. You could look at it simply in terms of time, how much time are you spending, say, going to see the latest avante garde films, or how much time are you actually spending on painting or writing poetry in proportion to the amount of time that you are spending studying the Dharma, meditating or talking with your spiritual friends? I think that would be just a rough and ready guide, a sort of rule of thumb, just how much time you are allocating to these different interests, these different avocations.

Prassanasiddhi: Presumably, well if you are painting a Buddhist subject then you would say that was...

S: Yes, then you would be in the happy position of, so to speak, killing two birds with one stone. Or if you were writing a book on Buddhism, a book on the Dharma you would be writing, you would be engaged in literary activity, that's cultural but at the same time it is a book- about the Dharma. One would have to be quite discerning, because you might,

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for instance, write a novel. It could be that even though that novel wasn't ostensible about Buddhism, or didn't bring Buddhism in an overt way, but nonetheless it had quite a profound significance and that its overall effect on the mind of the person reading it would be to help move them in the direction of the Dharma, almost without them knowing it. So one has to be very careful about what one was actually concerned with. What was the actual nature of one's concern and one's activity. But again this leaves room for self-deception and therefore one needs to be quite clear and quite honest. Someone might say that his writing of poetry was a means of personal spiritual development but that would have to be actually examined. Was it actually working like that? Was it actually having that effect, was it in fact an instrument of personal development or was it just a self-indulgence?

Prassanasiddhi: I was wondering a bit about that as well. People often say that you can find the Dharma, if you go deep enough into an object of culture, or Western culture you can find the Dharma somewhere at the bottom of it. I was wondering to what extent the .....

S: It depends who you are. I said that I could, teaching a classical English poem find the Dharma in that. But I didn't say- that I thought everybody or anybody could, because in order to find the Dharma you have got to have the Dharma first. So therefore I don't think you can communicate the Dharma through, say, literature, through poetry or find it in literature or poetry unless it is already there in you or at least its very near the surface of your experience.

Prassanasiddhi: So you could, perhaps, say that until you really had the Dharma in you you'd have to engage with pure Dharmic activities to be more likely to...

S: Probably, but I'd also say another thing and that is that one must be quite sure that one is really engaged with culture. Instead of just talking about culture in general, maybe we could be more specific, talk about painting, talk about writing poetry or doing sculpture. It is very easy just to play around with these things and think that you are involved with the arts or into the arts, but really you are just dabbling- you are just an amateur. And there is far too much of that, I think, in the modern world. People commit themselves to this or that art with far too little seriousness. If you committed yourself to a branch of science in that way you would never get away with it- but you commit yourself in that lukewarm, dilapidated, wishy-washy way to some art or other and you can get away with it, apparently. So when one is speaking of an involvement with culture an involvement with one or another of the arts, one is speaking of a very serious, a very wholehearted, a very strenuous sort of involvement. Any other sort of involvement doesn't really count. Through that sort of involvement perhaps you can approach the Dharma, or from one or another of the arts approached in that sense, perhaps you can illicit the Dharma. But not when you are just sort of tinkering around with painting and tinkering around with poetry or tinkering around with flower arrangement, or whatever it happens to be.

Devamitra: But presumably you would have had to come

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thoroughly to grips with the Dharma before you involved yourself in that discipline.

S: Not necessarily. Because again it begs the question what does one mean by involving oneself with the Dharma. Does it mean studying the history of Buddhism or does it mean facing up, in one way or another, to certain profound existential questions or existential issues? You can, I think, if you are sufficiently sincere, to use that term, do that through the medium of one or another of the arts, at least to some extent.

Devamitra: But don't you need an anchor point? I think you mentioned that the other evening, talking about the Dharma at one's death.

S: Yes but then we are talking about a very hypothetical you'. Is this you, someone who is involved within the FWBO or someone right outside, or someone with an interest in Buddhism in general?

Devamitra: I suppose that I was personally was thinking more in terms of people actually involved in the FWBO.

S: I would say that in the case of someone actively involved in the FWBO it is probably much better to approach the Dharma directly and spend as much of your time on that as you possibly can. By all means develop an appreciation of, an interest in the arts and the sciences but definitely in a subordinate and ancillary sort of way, not as a rival interest. And if you do involve yourself in one or another of the arts or sciences do it with full seriousness and intensity. It can help one to some extent and also it can, for certain other people with whom you are in contact, function perhaps as a medium of communication, or at least as a means of approach.

Dave Living: Do you think that is one of the ways of testing whether your involvement in art is real, whether it helps you communicate with other people? Because if it is a means of cutting yourself off from other people it may be unhealthy, dilettantish.

S: No, in fact on the contrary, very often it happens that if you really want to create something worthwhile you have to cut yourself off from other people, like Michelangelo. You haven't much time for other people when you are flat on your back on scaffolding sixty feet above the floor painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to cover it with your frescoes. Think, for instance, of Beethoven, think even of Wagner, the extent to which they had to cut themselves off from other people in order to get on with their creative work. So creative work doesn't necessarily bring in contact with people in that sort of immediate way. Once you have produced your work then of course it may function as a means of communication between you and other people. But it may well be that while producing that work of art you have to almost rule out contact with other people. You've not time. Most artists would have time, though some have tried to lead a busy social life in the intervals of producing masterpieces. Some have been able to do it, it would seem but they are very, very few. (end side 1)

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S: (contd) I must say that I think that when one has discussions of this sort about - or even questions of this sort - about religion and cultural Buddhism and culture, there is a danger of the discussion being (or becoming) so general as to be meaningless. Because the field is so vast, it's just so complex, I think one has to try to adduce individual instances, and specific references to specific arts and specific artists, specific poets, as soon as one can. Otherwise I think it's not easy to throw much light on any of these questions. Anyway, what's next?

Vessantara: Most of the rest of the questions pertain to your discussion of morality. Simon had a question.

Simon Turnbull: This is regarding your comments about the all-pervasive effect of Christian conditioning on culture. And I was wondering if you felt there should be more open public attacks on conventional morality, in the form of - well, at least literature and talks. Or do you think this might be counter-productive because of the undermining effect it would have on society?

S: Say that again. (laughter) Just bit by bit.

Simon Turnbull: It's regarding your comments about the all-pervasive effect of Christian conditioning on. ...

S: Well, do we agree that there is an all-pervasive effect of Christian conditioning in the first place? A few people at least claim not to be affected by that. One or two people I know within the movement, a few people anyway, have been brought up by humanist or even atheist parents, and they do maintain that they've not been particularly affected by any Christian conditioning. So I think first of all we have to be fairly clear, or at least have some reasonably clear idea, as to exactly how general this Christian conditioning is, and (sort of) what form it takes in particular. I mean is it so all-pervasive as is sometimes alleged? I think we need to be clear about this first. Also perhaps we need to be clear as to whether it is wholly a negative conditioning, or whether it does not perhaps have some positive features as well. I think we have to be open to that possibility too. So has anybody got anything to say on these points before we get down to the discussion?



Abhaya: To get back to your lecture, you say something about the Christian attitude to sexual morality has been responsible for the demolition or destruction or damage of thousands, not to say millions, of people. Well, that seems to be the main (unclear) ... and it seems serious enough to postulate(?) (some words unclear)...

S: Yes, because after all the Christian attitude towards matters of sexual morality is still reflected to quite a considerable extent in the laws - for instance laws governing marriage and divorce - in many Western states. For instance there is not a single Western state, to the best of my knowledge, in which polygamy is legal. Well, I would consider that a great infringement of the liberty of the individual. Not that I myself am especially inclined to polygamy (laughter) so I'm being entirely disinterested here. But monogamy has been forced on the entire population. I mean let people from other countries speak for themselves, but in the case of Britain the only permissible form of matrimony (holy or otherwise) is monogamous. So this is a direct conditioning deriving from the Christian-Judaic, or Judaic-Christian, tradition. The Greeks, as far as I recollect, were not strictly

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monogamous. And neither were our friends the Romans. I believe that some of the Northern peoples were, I won't be too sure about that, but I believe that Tacitus has something to say about that in his Germania. But anyway be that as it may. The whole of Western society has had imposed upon it this monogamous Christian marital ethic. It has not presented as a matter of convenience or anything of that sort. It has been presented as the one and only right pattern of married life. And polygamy has been looked upon not as an alternative pattern, but as a form of immorality. So here there is - in this area at least, in this particular instance - a clear instance of conditioning - of Christian conditioning.

And even people who wouldn't consider themselves as Christians might well be horrified - even humanists and atheists-- by the idea of people living polygamously, of a man having (as it were) officially more than one wife, legally more than one wife. But in Buddhism there is nothing against that. Buddhism does not lay down monogamy as the invariable rule for married people, for men. So one might say that as a Buddhist one could claim that one's freedom to practise one's religion in this particular area was being restricted. Because your religion, i.e. Buddhism, does not require you to be monogamous if you are married. In the same way if you were a Muslim you could say that the law of Britain restricts your freedom to practise the Muslim religion, which permits a Muslim to have up to four wives. And it is extraordinary that in some Muslim states, or former Muslim states, monogamy has been made compulsory by law, as in Turkey. And polygamy after all.... I mean how ridiculous, to this extent these non-Christian countries have been influenced by this Christian sexual ethic, which has got nothing to do with their own religion and culture. Similarly in India - you can't be... well, Hindu law is a bit complex, but broadly speaking a certain (even) legal sanction attaches to monogamy, that does not attach to polygamy, much less still to polyandry. So there we are, there is a clear instance. But any other area, apart from the area or field of sexual ethics, where Christian conditioning is all-pervasive?

A voice: Authority?

S: Well is authority necessarily a Christian concept? I mean the old Romans had a very strong concept of authority, both within the family and within the state. The very word is of Roman origin.

Abhaya: I suppose associated with sexuality really is the nuclear family. A social unit being inviolable, not by law but there's a very strong (sort of) pressure isn't there? In that particular area. Which is strongly influenced (I would have thought) by Christianity.

S: That's true perhaps, but I was trying to get round to some quite different area.

Mike Shaw: The attitude to death is quite strongly Christian isn't it?

S: Well what is our attitude to death?

Mike Shaw: It's treated as something pretty dreadful, which I gather is not quite the same in India, for instance.

S: In what sense not quite the same in India? People do dread death in India.

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Abhaya: The clinical attitude to death, there's a lot of sweeping under the carpet, and not facing up to the reality of it.

S: But is-that specifically Christian? Because after all to do justice to the facts, the *momento mori* (?) was given definitely Christian form. You can find on many Christian tombstones representations of skeletons and skulls, and there were burial places where skeletons and skulls were kept in large numbers and which people used to visit. So can one really say that traditional Christianity did in fact sweep death under the carpet? Didn't monks at least practise the constant recollection of death in many cases? I mean to what extent.... I mean, agreeing that in the West, or say in England at least, (that being the country I know best in the West) people do, yes, sweep the fact of death under the carpet. Is that specifically Christian? And is the fact that they do that due to their specifically Christian conditioning? Perhaps it's something to do with their having got away from Christianity to some extent. I mean, for instance, there used always to be the laying out of the corpse and the friends and the relations coming to have a look. And the wake in some parts of the British Isles. There's the lying in state of the king or the queen when they die, or some other prominent person. So is it true that Christianity, as such, in the West, did in fact sweep the fact of death under the carpet? Let us be quite sure of our facts before going on to draw conclusions from those facts.

Abhaya: (unclear)

S: Let's put it this way: there's something odd about the Christian attitude to death, huh? But let's be quite circumspect, quite careful in identifying it.

Greg : A morbid preoccupation.

S: A morbid preoccupation, well in what way does it show itself? Can preoccupation with death be morbid?

Greg Shanks: I was thinking about the skeletons you mentioned - things like that.

S: But how is that morbid? Because we've got that in Buddhism too. The Tibetans love these things!

Greg Shanks: It seems that it's not a way of facing it. It's a sort of fascination, inasmuch as when you're terrified of something you also feel an attraction at the same time. There's an ambivalence...

S: Well, that's natural surely. Isn't that natural? Aren't Tibetans fascinated by skulls and bones and things?

Abhaya: No, it's something to do - I think - with the identification of... in spite of the Christian teaching about body and soul...

S: Ah!

Abhaya: .. it's something to do with a sort of morbid preoccupation of identifying the total self with the body...

S: Yes, right...

Abhaya: . . even when the soul's departed so to speak...

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S: Right, yes...

Abhaya: ... there's a (sort of) identification of the total...

S: Yes, you find this constantly in literature. That when the body is buried, well, he is down there... the worms are eating him. - Not the worms are eating his body but the worms are eating him.~And I think this, perhaps, has got something to do with Christianity. Because Christianity does teach the resurrection of the body, and that is at least popularly understood as the literal resuscitation and reconstitution of the corpse, which meanwhile of course is having all sorts of horrible things done to it by worms (laughter). I was reading a little dialogue which Dr Dunn imagines in one of his sermons taking place. And he imagines the soul as (sort of) looking down at its own dead body, and it imagines a little worm coming from the body, and the soul says to this little worm: "Little worm, would you like to change places with me?" So the little worm says "No, I wouldn't like to change places with you." And the soul says "Why?" and the little worm says "Well, because you're damned..." (laughter) I'm only a little worm, I've issued from all the nauseous fluids in your decomposing body. I'm going to die, but you're going to live for ever and you're damned!" (laughter) So, this curious little dialogue is the sort of thing that one tends to get in Christianity. One can't imagine this sort of dialogue taking place in a Buddhist context. So there is this... yes, this I think is morbid: this fascination with the decomposing corpse, which is identified with the actual person, the actual deceased person. And I think this gives death, where there is a question of Christian conditioning, a peculiar sort of horror, a peculiar sort of frisson(?) if you see what I mean, that you don't get in Buddhism or Hinduism or perhaps even in Islam. So there is this rather odd sort of feeling that we do have I think about death. At least partly for this reason. I'm sure there's a lot more that could be said on the subject, and I'm sure we haven't, by any means, worked it all out. Though I think there is this element at least of (sort of) horrified fascination with the decomposing, decaying body in our overall attitude to death, and that this is traceable back to our Christian conditioning.

prasannasiddhi: There's also... (just general reflections)... I've almost thought that the whole rise of industrialism and modern technology; I've tended to trace it back to a Christian (sort of) denial of the flesh in a sense. You know, not feeling that the body is evil, the flesh is evil, the world is evil. And because of all this I (for instance) do think that maybe that's caused....

S: That's quite a big question. One would have to read something like "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism", that's the classic in this field. But perhaps we should go back to Simon's question - we're still actually on those. All right that's a (sort of) preliminary clearing-up operation. So where does that leave us? in terms of your questions.

Simon Turnbull: Should there be more open attacks on conventional morality?

S: Well, one's essential - one's basic objective - is to spread the dharma. One doesn't want to attack anything for the sake of attacking anything. But spreading the dharma traditionally has got two aspects: of propagating the truth, or spreading the truth, and dispelling error. And sometimes the two are very closely connected. For instance you

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cannot put forward the non-theistic Buddhist point of view without ipso facto rejecting, and surely giving reasons for rejecting, belief in a personal God. So that will obviously be taken by some people as an attack on the notion of God, or an attack on God himself. I think actually, historically, perhaps with some reason, the Buddhists in the West so far have been much too afraid. Maybe that isn't too strong a term. At least reluctant - to emphasise points of difference where points of difference not only exist, but are an integral part of, or essential to, the teaching (that is to say Buddhism) which they are supposed to have embraced. For instance I can't help feeling quite disappointed (to say the least) when I find someone like the Dalai Lama apparently, at least on public occasions in the West, and when he's on a virtually Christian platform, prevaricating, practically, on this question of God. He knows perfectly well that Buddhism is a non-theistic teaching; he knows perfectly well that belief in an ishvara(?) is rejected in all the Buddhist sources, but he doesn't come straight out with that on public

platforms in the West. He seems a bit concerned at least to make some sort of common cause with Christianity, and therefore not only to play down the non-theistic character of Buddhism, but even to let it appear that Buddhism is not in fact non-theistic. I think that is very unfortunate.

Phil Miller: Wouldn't he jeopardise his position in the West because he's a refugee?

S: Well, he's a refugee in India, not in the West.

Phil Miller: Yeah, but like in the States it would seem he could raise a lot of antagonism towards him personally if he... well, because of the Fundamentalist movements.

S: Well, that may well be. Though I think as a Buddhist one has to take that risk. Not that you're going out of your way to attack anybody. But if you're asked a question, if you are challenged you must be completely honest about what you believe. Otherwise what is our so-called freedom of speech worth? And I think you don't have to be aggressive, you don't have to be provocative, you can say what you have to say in a reasonable and positive and friendly sort of way. There's a lot of people of course that will not help you. With quite a lot of people, I'm sure, the very fact that there is a Dalai Lama, that he is a Buddhist, and calls himself a Buddhist, probably gives sufficient offence anyway. So perhaps one doesn't really need to bother about (you know) that sort of thing. But yes, I think perhaps we do need to go and little more on the offensive, at least in a (sort of) analytical way, say taking this question of negative Christian psychological conditioning. Just analyse it and try to show in a calm, objective sort of way exactly what has happened. You don't have to (you know) go over the top and get all excited and worked up and anything of that sort. All right. There was something else wasn't there?

Simon Turnbull: Yes. Do you think this sort of attack might have a counter-productive effect because of its undermining effect on society?

S: Counter-productive because of its undermining effect on society. Do you mean in the sense that it is still Christianity or Christian ethics that holds society together? It could well be, it could well be. Therefore I think you should never indulge in a purely negative, purely

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destructive criticism. The negative or destructive side should always come in as the negative and destructive side of something which is positive and creative. You should show the two at the same time - one at the same time as the other. In other words your destructiveness, your criticism is incidental and not essential to your approach. But we shouldn't (sort of) soft pedal, we shouldn't prevaricate, we shouldn't conceal our views. I mean to the extent that it is in fact possible to communicate that. I mean, I've met, over the last year, a few groups of Christians. It isn't difficult to talk to them, the main difficulty is their ignorance. And that really is astonishing, especially in the case of those clergymen in particular who have made some study of non-Christian religions and expressed some interest in them. But their ignorance is really astonishing. And that simply suggests that it is very, very difficult actually to overcome your own conditioning, your own tendency, your own prone-ness to see things in a particular way, without a very definite effort to overcome that, or to counteract that.

Dave Living: Ignorance of Buddhism or ignorance of Christianity?

S: Ignorance of Buddhism I'm talking about. I came across a point of this general sort reading, or dipping just recently into a book on Milton, which someone thought I might be interested in seeing, which of course I was. And the author makes reference to something that Carlisle wrote about the seventeenth century generally. He said (I mean he was writing in about 1840, which is 140 years ago) and he wrote apparently even then that it was very difficult for people to understand the seriousness with everybody in the seventeenth century took the Christian religion, with what seriousness they believed in God, and with what conviction they believed that God was actually personally interfering in nation politics and military campaigns and so on. He said that was the sort of state of mind that it is very difficult for us now, he says in 1840, to imagine ourselves back into. So this would have been very difficult for a man of the seventeenth century in England to imagine a social order, a nation, that was not solidly based on the rock of the word of God, and so on and so forth. I mean in those days they couldn't really imagine, say, a community of people who didn't believe in God. They honestly seemed to believe, if they considered it at all, that if people didn't believe in God, well, society would

automatically immediately fall apart. Or even if people didn't believe in the Trinity, or the incarnation, or the atonement. They believed civil society would just disintegrate. So it takes quite an effort of imagination for us to project ourselves into the state of mind of those people, three hundred years ago, even though they might have been our own ancestors. Look what a difference. So it's just the same with, say, Christians approaching Buddhism. Even if they're making a sincere attempt to understand it, it is very difficult for them not to operate with their own assumptions and their own concepts and try to accommodate Buddhism to those. But for the time being at least, perhaps it's the only way they can operate, until they come in contact with someone, or read some book, which can really throw some light on the matter for them. For instance this hoary old chestnut of: How is it that Buddhists, who do not believe in God, can worship the Buddha. They really think they've caught you ought in some terrible contradiction, and that they'll really have you wriggling on a pin (as it were) trying to explain this awful contradiction in your religion. They really think they've got you stumped. (laughter) They bring it up time and again. I've not met a group of Christians or a group of clergymen (I don't mean to distinguish between the two in any

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way) who don't bring it up. And you (sort of) lay it forward step by step, and yes, they can grasp your explanation, but clearly it's a revelation almost, it represents a completely new, a completely different point of view, that they had not been able to conceive of before, which seems astonishing and incredible. But that is how it is. Of course it does work the other way round, because I have heard that there are Buddhists in Thailand who find it quite impossible to understand how anybody, any sensible human being, could believe in a God who created the world. The idea just makes them fall over them- selves laughing (laughter). They don't even have a word in their language, apparently, for God. So apparently it takes a Christian missionary a great deal of time and trouble to explain this weird notion of a god, a personal god, who has actually made the heavens and the earth. Well, you might say it was as difficult for the ordinary Thai to (enter or imagine the state)? of mind or point of view of a Christian. But I mean this is just another sort of example. It's a (sort of) reversing the situation, just for the sake of interest (as it were). So we have to try always to (sort of) transcend the limitations of our own point of view, and at least try to imagine the possibility of somebody actually believing something that we don't believe. We can then still reject it, but at least we won't be finding it absolutely incredible, or even impossible, that somebody should believe in that particular idea or that particular concept. Anyway, is that all or was there something else?

Simon Turnbull: I suppose that's covered it pretty well, except this question of whether you think there should be more public attacks on conventional morality in the form of published literature and talks. Although you did talk about the fact that we should just be destructive, we should be creative.

S: I personally think that if... I mean, don't flog a dead horse. (laughter) I think you hardly need really criticise Christianity very much, there's all sorts of rationalists and secularists doing it. They probably do it much better than you can, they're much more vulgar. (laughter) I think, actually, if there are any sort of miccha-ditthis that require attack, they're these so-called pseudo-liberal ones. I think those are the dangerous ones now. Not belief in a personal God, or heaven after death, I don't think you need bother about those things. But this pseudo-egalitarian myth, and this (sort of) anti-hierarchical nonsense, and things like that. I think those are the concepts more that one perhaps should take up arms against.

Greg Shanks: Would not the emergence of Fundamentalism. Would not the emergence of the evangelical churches in America and Fundamentalism point to the fact that Christianity... it's still possible for it to arise again? In a different form?

S: Hmm. I'm not sure of the extent to which one can regard that (sort of) Christian neo-Fundamentalism that has arisen in America quite definitely, as expresses itself for instance in the form of a "moral majority" can be regarded as Christian in the traditional sense. Nonetheless I think it does constitute a menace. I don't think by the very nature of that particular frame of mind that you really combat it by rational means, by argument. I think all that you can do is to safeguard your own freedoms, which you'll have to do by political and legal means. Because they very often seek to restrict your freedom and to impose their own view. And I think that one will have to counter through the ballot box and through the courts. I don't think probably there's much point, in the case of such people, trying to do it by means of controversial literature. I think they're not very likely to read it, and if they read

it they're not very likely to be convinced because they've not adopted their present positions for any reasons, so they're not going to be dislodged from those positions by reason. So I think they're in perhaps a rather different category. And they do of course attempt to limit the freedom of what is supposed to be the non-moral minority. I'm not sure whether they are in fact a minority or not. But whether that non-moral minority is in fact a minority, or in fact a majority, it has to defend itself. After all what did Abraham Lincoln say, to quote him, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty". So one has to be eternally vigilant that one's laws aren't being changed while one's back is turned. And that those laws which are designed to safe-guard the freedom of the individual are in fact being honoured, are in fact being obeyed, not circumvented.

Greg Shanks: But have you not said in this specific context that Christianity is not a threat as long as it doesn't hold secular power. But if it ever got in that position again then it would be willing to persecute most religions. So with foresight a way of practising non-violence would be to undermine that structure, not to let it get in that position again.

S: Hmm. I wouldn't say that Christianity is only a danger or a menace when it possesses political power. Because it has other ways of influencing people - I mean psychological, through its educational institutions and so on. And even where an institution or ideology doesn't actually possess supreme political power it can still be pretty influential. I think a great change has in fact taken place in organised Christianity. It would seem that the Catholic Church at present, from what reading I've been doing recently, is in a state of disarray. For instance supposing for the sake of argument that the Catholic Church gains political power, well, it's not going to be the Catholic Church as such, en bloc, that gains political power; it's going to be the Catholic Church in a particular country, in a particular state, and the Catholic Church in different states seems to think differently. A lot of Catholic churches apparently, especially it would seem in some South American churches, are very much of a (sort of) left wing sympathy and persuasion. So if they came to power, well, it wouldn't be quite the same as an old (sort of) counter-reformation type Catholic church coming into power. It could be very, very different. It might even be preferable to certain other regimes. One has to recognise that. I think even during the last twenty years things have changed very, very much. So I think one has to be quite careful that one doesn't find oneself out of date. As I've said I've been doing a little bit of reading in this area recently and I've had to some extent bring myself up to date, because since I've been back in this country ((i.e. Italy)) the situation has changed. They've had quite a succession of popes and they've brought about quite a few changes. And it does seem that on the whole the Catholic Church isn't quite what it used to be. It has of course still a few teeth left. I think we still have to be quite careful of it. I think you can't afford to ignore it or to assume that there's no harm left in it. But it is a much less dangerous beast than it used to be. Quite a few of its hydra heads have been cut off it would seem, and they haven't necessarily all sprouted again. But I personally feel that the danger that we're up against most closely in the movement itself in the FWBO, the sort of wrong thinking that affects us most intimately and most insidiously is that deriving from what I've termed pseudo-liberalism. And I think what we have to guard against most of all, leaving aside these particular isms and ologies, is just woolly and fuzzy thinking in ourself and in others.

I think that is the main enemy really. And there's an awful lot of that woolly and fuzzy thinking around, and it's not by any means all outside the FWBO. It does affect a lot of people in the FWBO, even in the Order, like a great thick (sort of) blanket of fog which is very difficult sometimes to see through. So if Buddhism historically, traditionally, is characterised by anything on an intellectual level so to speak, it is characterised by clarity and honesty and rigour of thinking. But I'm afraid there isn't really much of that yet in the FWBO. I think people aren't sufficiently accustomed to analyse things, to analyse situations, propositions, to draw conclusions really rigourously from evidence properly adduced. People still tend to go on hunches and just bits and pieces of information, little scraps of knowledge.

And there are all sorts of weird and wonderful conclusions from that. People(?) are not nearly thorough enough.

: Do you think we should incorporate such training in the Tuscany course?

S: I think it's not a question of incorporating it as a separate subject, it should pervade all discussions, and you should take one another up, you should challenge perhaps one another much more. Not in a nit-picking, unnecessarily contraversial sort of way, that is not what is wanted at all. It's something much more serious than that. But make sure that when you do have a discussion you really do know what you're talking about. And that's not as common as you might think. I mean what is the meaning of the words that one uses. Go back to the Pali terms, go back to your Pali dictionary, your Sanskrit dictionary, your English dictionary perhaps above all. Be really clear about the meaning of the terms you use, to the extent that clarity, by the very nature of the subject, is possible. I notice sometimes people are very careless in their use of words, they mix up one word with another. The other day I noticed, some evenings ago, someone was mixing up - I think it was "imbued" and "immersed". I don't know if anybody noticed that. But anyway it was something like that. Those may not have been the actual words. One of the words was imbued and there was another word rather like it...

A voice: Imbibed.

S: Imbibed. Yes, I think that. So one must be on the lookout even for Tittle things of that sort, because it all indicates a lack of precision in the use of words. Therefore uncertainty in the use of language and unclarity of communication. Perhaps in the FWBO people for some reason or other have come to be too afraid of what they think of as an intellectual approach. But one does not safeguard against the undoubted dangers of an overly intellectual approach by being intellectually sloppy. I mean that is not the way to go about it. (end tape 9) or a seminar or a workshop in logic. I think it would be an excellent idea. Not that the study of formal logic necessarily teaches you how to think or how to reason correctly, but at least it enables you to identify (and this is very useful) your own fallacies in argument. And I think that can be very useful. Fallacies in your own arguments and in those of other people.

Phil Shann: Would you say it's a serious block to your spiritual development if you can't think...

S: I think it is to some extent when you come to develop Insight. Because a conceptual expression of the dharma is the (sort of) basis

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for the development of Insight, traditionally speaking. I mean for instance you have the concept of impermanence, and you think about impermanence, and it's on the basis of your clear thinking about impermanence that you develop insight into the truth of impermanence, actual insight. But it would seem that the clarity of the intellectual understanding comes first, that's (sort of) a base, that's (sort of) a springboard. So when you come to something (for instance) like anata and sunyata, well, how are you going to get some inklings of it, the beginnings of intuition, if you haven't got some refined, (sort of) precise intellectual formulation to begin with. That intellectual formulation itself, in its proper, in its correct form, having originally been (you know) the Buddha's own communication of what was for Him a Transcendental experience. In other words how can you get (sort of) back to that Transcendental experience on the part of the Buddha, of which the intellectual, the conceptual formulation, is an expression, unless you can be sure of correctly and thoroughly understanding that conceptual expression on its own level first? Otherwise it would seem that the necessary connection is not going to be established.

Abhaya: Isn't the Insight, Bhante, completely independent of perceptual thought? Isn't it meant to be...

S: Ah! It is independent of conceptual thought, but then how do you develop it? It doesn't just (sort of) come into existence. And the traditional method is that you take up those conceptual formulations (as I call them) which traditionally are expressions of the Buddha's Transcendental Insight or Transcendental Insight of His disciples, and by reflecting on them, which means you first of all must understand them, by reflecting on them with your concentrated mind, you get (so to speak) an inkling

of their Transcendental import.

Abhaya: So couldn't one develop Insight through simply building up merit. Merit and merit... and building up more and more merit, and skilful action and cutting out the unskilful action? Wouldn't that...

S: No. According to Buddhist tradition, no. That no amount of merit, without understanding (let us say), without Insight, is going to lead you to the Transcendental. It'll just lead you to one good rebirth after another. In addition to the punya-sambara you need the jnana- sambara.

Phil Shann: Couldn't you develop Insight through the visualisation practice? Because the image is a Transcendental...

S: Yes. But you have to recognise that. When you say that the image is an image of the Transcendental, what do you mean? Because the usual procedure is not that you regard the image as an image of the Transcendental; the usual procedure is that you reflect that that image, the visualised image, has arisen in dependence on causes and conditions. And inasmuch as it has arisen in dependence upon causes and conditions it is not completely Real. But nonetheless it has arisen, therefore it is not completely unreal. And you see that neither the concept of real, nor the concept of unreal is sufficient to exhaust the situation. You see that 'Reality' (inverted commas) transcends real and unreal existence and non-existence. But you (as it were) see this with the help of certain (you know) conceptual formulations which on their conceptual or intellectual level, reflect (so to speak, this is of course an image) the Transcendental Reality which they (as it were) express. This is the

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traditional procedure. So therefore a clear conceptual understanding is quite quite important, if one follows this particular approach.

Abhaya: You said "this particular approach". That implies there's another approach.

S: Well, yes and no. For instance you could say well, take this question of impermanence. You could say that you can Enlightenment just by, say, watching a leaf fall, by watching another leaf fall. But what actually happens? (Silence)... (laughter) Well, when you see a leaf fall, well, you might say that "Well, the leaf falls", that's all that you see. How do you get from that to the universal truth of impermanence, because it's the universal truth of impermanence that you have to understand, or have insight into? It's not enough just to see one leaf fall. (pause) Is it? (pause) ... (laughter) So one must see another leaf fall, and another leaf. Or you might even see just one leaf fall. But you can (as it were) conclude something from that. That enables you to see something which is that all leaves fall. So that is an idea, a general idea. You don't just see the leaf fall, I mean, your mind starts working. And your mind as it were (word unclear) you, or you say to yourself, well, "It's not just this leaf; all leaves fall. Everything that arises comes to an end." But your mind is going through certain processes, you are making (as it were) certain conceptual formulations. It is not simply that you see the leaf fall; there is a sort of intermediate stage.

Abhaya: Yes, but couldn't this insight arise in dependence on ... I mean would it necessarily have to arise in dependence on how one really worked to clarify one's thinking, really developed intellectually, consciously. I mean it seems to be in the Zen stories that there just may be ordinary men who have no cultural background...

S: Ah! But what have they been doing? They've been meditating. And by meditating they have got rid of all mental one-sidedness or bias or prejudice or preconception or psychological or even cultural conditioning. So it's as though their minds can function very very freely and in an unhampered (sort of) way, in a spontaneous (sort of) way.

Abhaya: So therefore, couldn't we conclude that another approach would be by meditation, rather than by developing one's intellectually clear thinking?



S: The two aren't really separate because under meditation one includes not only the samatha-bhavana but the vipassana-bhavana too. You (as it were) by means of the samatha-bhavana, by means of the experience of the dhyanas, you (as it were) purge the instrument, which is your reason (if you like) or your intelligence, and that is able either to recognise conceptual formulations which are presented by tradition, or to make its own conceptual formulations which then act as a (sort of) springboard for the development of actual insight. It's as though you don't go directly from perception, without concept, to insight. It's as though there is the intermediate stage or level of concepts.

Abhaya: So that would seem to be (true?). So one could conclude that Enlightenment depends to some extent on an innate intelligence, a level of intelligence.

S: Oh yes, oh yes. Which does not necessarily, of course, have anything to do with literacy, or book-knowledge, or anything of that sort.

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The ability to think clearly, yes. And that ability to think clearly is enhanced by the purificatory nature of the meditation process, in the sense of the samatha-bhavana process. So (for instance) someone might (quote?) Hui-Neng: he had meditated, he'd worked (you know) in the monastery. When he heard the words of the Diamond Sutra he knew what they were all about. He could recognise the import of the Diamond Sutra because there was nothing in his mind, which was purified (say) by meditation and his whole way of life, to obstruct his immediate apprehension first of all of what the words of the sutra meant, conceptually speaking, and then, what those concepts meant in terms of insight and Transcendental Wisdom.

Abhaya: So could we then conclude that maybe people who were living full-time at Vajraloka, given that they've got a certain modicum of intelligence, they wouldn't need to (say) do any study or clarify their thought at all, but just pursue their meditations. And given that they have this (shall we say) modicum of intelligence, when the moment comes that they've built up enough samatha, then they would be able to develop insight.

S: But this is the standard or the classical way. I mean, not that insight cannot develop, in other situations, but for most people it would seem, at least historically speaking, that it is most likely to arise or develop in that sort of situation.

Abhaya: So what I'm really asking is would you agree that not all of us have to develop and clarify thought, only perhaps some people who are more interested and inclined in this area?

S: Oh no. Everybody who is interested in developing insight, and therefore achieving Stream-Entry, needs to clarify their thinking. Just as much as they need to make their emotional life more positive. One could say that the two things really go along hand in hand. You need, in one way or another, perhaps with the help of culture, to render your emotional life more and more refined, and more and more positive. At the same time, with the help perhaps of intellectual disciplines as well as of meditation, you need to make your intellectual life more clear, you know, more free from obfuscation, more free from vagueness and imprecision and emotional contamination and so on. And of course bring these two together. I think that one can say that in meditation, using the term for a combination of samatha and vipassana, what you've got is a sort of union, on a higher level, of your purified emotion and your clarified intelligence (let me say). The word intellect has a quite respectable history but it's been very debased in modern terms, we don't have a proper word for that faculty (so to speak) any more. In the Middle Ages there was a very clear distinction made between intellect and reason; we've lost that, intellect and reason have become more or less synonymous. And that is perhaps quite significant. Even intelligence is not really the right word.

Padmavajra: What would be the nearest one, in the original language?

S: Well, one could speak of prajna, but there are different levels of prajna. It is cintamaya-prajna, perhaps. It is cintamaya-prajna as combined with the sort of emotional positivity which is represented by the dhyanas and the four brahma-viharas. These two coming together, and (as it were) intensified

and raised to a higher level and a higher power (~as it were) in the mathematical sense, are what constitutes (one might say) or at least what bring about the arising of insight. Insight is not, despite the nomenclature, more of the nature of intelligence

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than of the nature of emotion. So therefore one sees that the clarification of ones thinking, in whatsoever way, is an integral part of the whole process of spiritual life and spiritual development. Just as much as the increasing refinement, and positivisation of ones whole emotional life. So one can say that Buddhism almost stands for these two things: emotional positivity and intellectual clarity. At their highest level these are compassion and wisdom. And of course at that highest level these two things, though distinguishable are not really seperable. So one might say that in the world at large and I'm afraid within the FWBO to a great extent perhaps, clarity of thinking is probably as rare as real emotional positivity. Well, one has to work on both and try to develop them both, do ones best to develop both. I think probably people do take quite a lot of interest in the development of emotional positivity, they're quite concerned about that, they understand that and the need for that. I think they don't perhaps understand quite so well in all cases the need for the development of intellectual clarity and precision, and objectivity and so on.

Abhaya: Would you say that this is holding, say, Order Members back from approaching Stream-Entry?

S: I think it must do, to the extent that it is an integral part of ones spiritual development it must hold you back. But again, we must be very clear, it does not mean becoming a scholar, it does not mean becoming better educated in the ordinary sense, it does not mean necessarily reading more books, it does not mean becoming an intellectual in the modern sense nor an academic in the modern sense. It just means using your intelligence. It's as simple as that.

Dave Living: Does contemplation have anything to do with this?

S: In what sense?

Dave Living: Contemplating, say, objects in order to get insight into the Wheel of Life or...

S: If by contemplation one means reflection on, in such a way as to come to an understanding of the meaning of, well, yes. Yes, indeed.

Devamitra: What you seem to be saying, putting it in traditional terms, is that there's a general absence of cintamaya-prajna in the movement.

S: Hmm, yes. I think that is true, yes. Because you could say that cintamaya-prajna is, in a way, critical thought. Not critical in the sense of (descriptive?) but more in the sense of the Kantian philosophy. Kant used the expression 'critical philosophy'. He distinguished between dogmatic philosophy, which was all philosophy up to him (laughter) and critical philosophy which was his philosophy. And, yes, there was some truth in that, because critical philosophy is philosophy which does not operate without examining and criticising its own fundamental assumptions. That's of course a very difficult thing to do. Of course you might even introduce a further refinement and say, well, that itself presupposes certain assumptions, but we won't go into that. So cintamaya-prajna is critical thinking in this sort of way; you ask yourself, well, why do I think like this? What is it that causes me to look at things in that particular way? Why do I operate with that particular concept? And what does that concept mean for me? This is critical thinking, self-critical thinking, or you might say truly aware thinking. This is